

THE

# HISTORIAN

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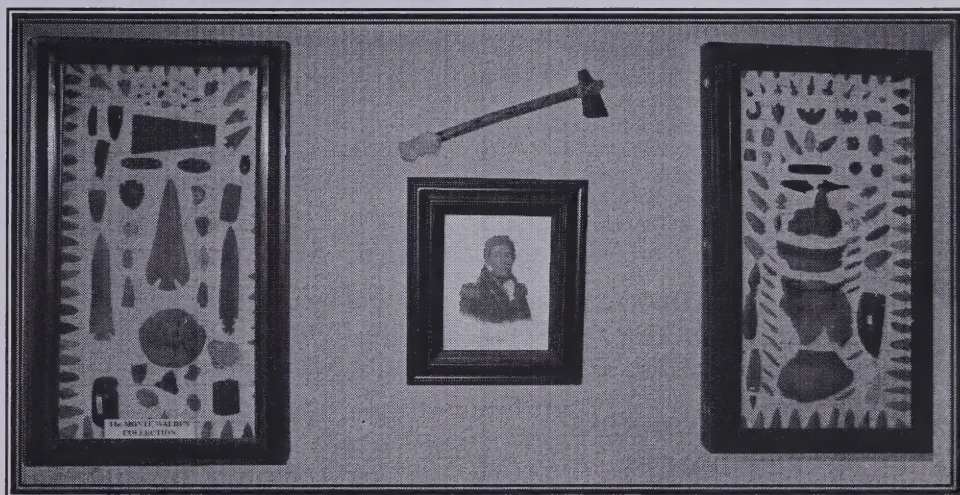
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

May 2009

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The May luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, May 21, 2009, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker has not been confirmed. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, May 20**, to make your reservation and to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-five people. The price of the lunch is \$8.00.



The Monte Walden Collection of  
Native American Artifacts

## THE MONTE WALDEN COLLECTION OF NATIVE AMERICAN ARTIFACTS

By  
Charles H. Gray

After Hurricane Katrina we received many visitors at the Lobrano House from throughout the United States. Among them were archeologists who came to study the archeological sites of earlier inhabitants of the area. In almost every case these researchers were drawn to our collection of Native American artifacts which are displayed in the shadowboxes on the north wall of the house, and they were amazed that we possessed such

a notable collection. The collection was donated to the society by Mrs. Monique Walden Chaix in memory of her father, William Monte Walden. Mr. Walden, though a man of the future who was employed in designing the space shuttle tanks at Stennis Space Center, spent many years deeply involved in archeology.

Mr. Walden was born in Olathe, Kansas, in 1918 in a house which had a sod roof for insulation against the elements. His mother was an artist and teacher who taught Native American children, so he grew up with knowledge of their culture.

In 1964 he married Pat, a T Sligli' Native American whose family heirlooms formed the beginning of their collections. Over

## ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still several months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Saturday, October 31, 2009, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House.

## THE

**HISTORIAN**

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor  
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**HANCOCK COUNTY  
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"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

the years he did research in Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Florida, Tennessee, and Alabama in addition to numerous Mississippi sites.

Mrs. Walden reports that her father was so excited after his first day at the Claiborne site in Hancock County that only his obligations at Stennis could drag him away.

Most of the articles in the society collection are from Hancock County although there are a number of ceremonial pieces traded from other locations. Some pieces are thought to have come from as far away as Yosemite National Park.

**POVERTY POINT,  
A PLACE AND  
A CULTURE**By  
Charles H. Gray

Poverty Point culture was a Native American civilization in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The economy was based largely on hunting, fishing, fowling, and gathering. It is also possible that horticulture was introduced since food supplies were adequate to support stable villages, regional centers, and a great ceremonial center at Poverty Point itself.

Poverty Point, the prime site for this culture, is located in West Carroll Parish, LA, in the northeastern corner of the state between the Mississippi and the Arkansas Rivers. These and other smaller rivers were cardinal factors in the vast trade net-

work that characterized the Poverty Point Culture.

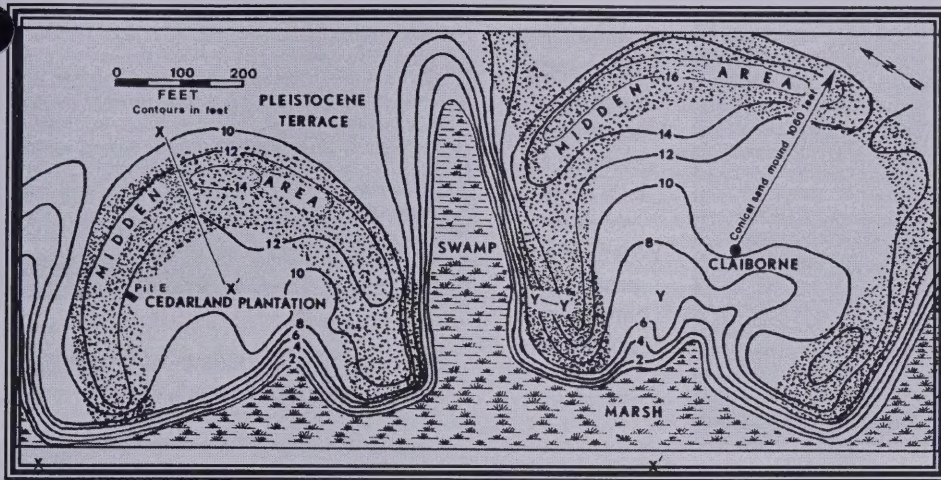
When the Poverty Point site was constructed, it was the largest earthwork in North and South America, and its satellite sites extended across Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, Alabama, and Florida.

Two prominent Poverty Point sites have been explored in Hancock County: the Claiborne and Cedarland Plantations. [These plantations were located south of present-day Port Benville on Mulatto Bayou in the extreme southwest corner of Hancock County.] Radiocarbon dating of artifacts taken from the Claiborne site by Charles Satchfield of the Mississippi Archaeological Society has determined the site existed as early as 1500 B. C.

The Claiborne and Cedarland sites are located on the first high ground upstream from the mouth of the Pearl River. They are immediately adjacent to each other with the Claiborne site directly south of the other. Despite the nearness of the two sites, the timber cover and dense undergrowth obscured the larger

*A midden is literally a dunghill or refuse heap. In archaeology it is a mound or deposit containing shells, animal bones, and other refuse that indicates the site of a human settlement.*

*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003. "Midden," The Free Dictionary, 2009, 6 May 2009 <www.thefreedictionary.com/midden>.*



A drawing of the locations of the middens on the Cedarland and Claiborne Plantations

Claiborne midden, and it remained undiscovered until 1967 when clearing was initiated for a new port and harbor facility in the area. It is thought that both villages were semicircular at the time of occupation, open-ended toward the estuary.

When the Hancock County Harbor and Port Commission leased the land from the L & N Railroad to build Port Benville, speedy excavation of the sites became necessary. In addition to professional archaeologists, amateurs active in the area made important collections and cooperated with efforts to salvage as much data as possible before destruction of the site. Monte Walden of Slidell, LA, was one such volunteer.

Claiborne is the largest Poverty Point coastal site and is presumed to be a regional center. It consists of a large, stratified, horseshoe-shaped midden composed of black earth midden and shells of the brackish water clam *Rangia cuneata* with some oyster shells. It has an outside diameter of approximately 660 feet

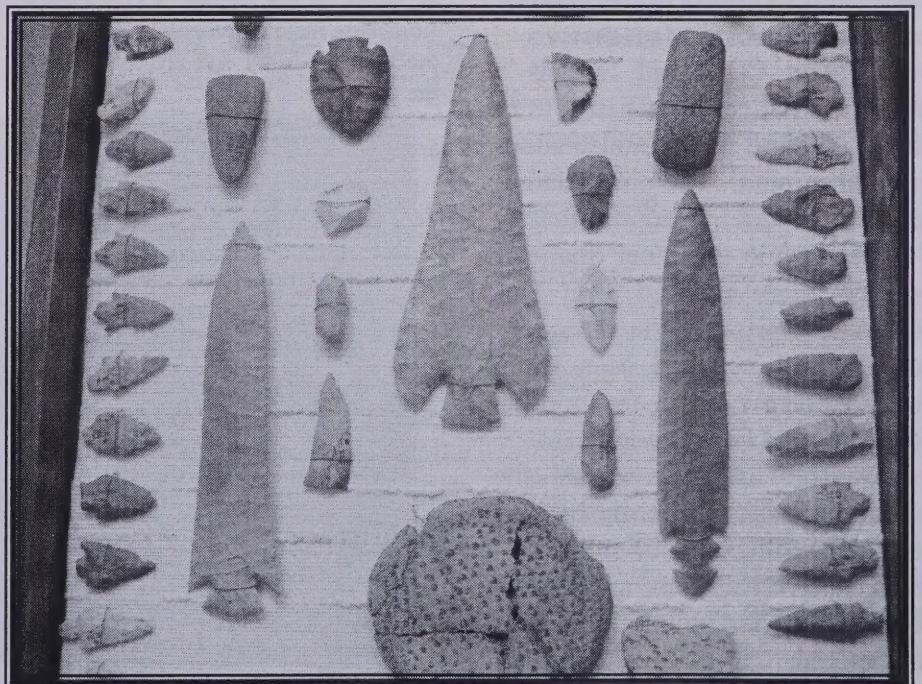
and an inside diameter of 460 feet. Associated with a semicircle, due east of its center at a distance of 1,060 feet, was a small conical sand mound. It was about seventy-five feet in diameter at the base and four feet high; unfortunately, it was destroyed before test excavations could be made. A careful search of the area before and

after bulldozing disclosed only a few scattered shell fragments.

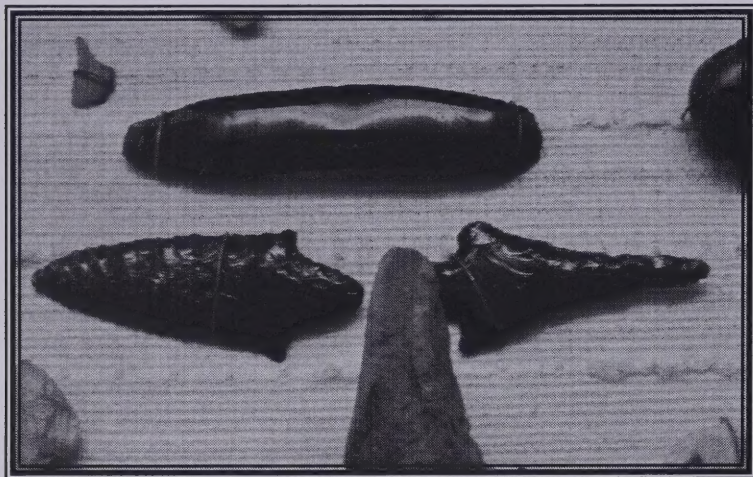
The quantity and variety of artifacts eclipse all the other site collections in the coastal area and lead one to conclude that Claiborne was a regional center participating fully in the widespread Poverty Point trade network and cultural organization, both up the Mississippi Valley and along the Gulf Coast. Approximately two hundred shards have been found at the site, of which 119 have been available for study.

The Walden collection came primarily from the excavations at the south end of the Claiborne semicircle. However, an entire fiber-tempered disc base was found by Mr. Walden at the north end of the midden.

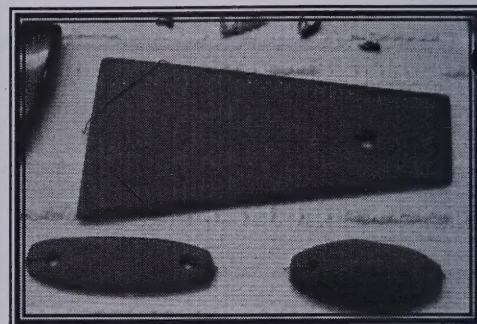
Three beautifully made points from the Pensacola Indians were found by Walden in a group at the south end of the Claiborne site, two of gray north-



The three large ceremonial points probably came into Hancock County through trade.



Although found in Hancock County, these three black artifacts (pictured at left) originated in Yosemite and probably came here through trade.



The large hatchet blade most probably came from Etowah, GA.

ern flint and the third of white, almost chalky, flint, all exotic materials. These may be ceremonial objects from the Poverty Point Site where similar caches have been found. Many materials not native to the area were apparently brought to the site, and finished objects were then manufactured there.

Vessel fragments were interspersed throughout the midden. The original collection contained 117 fragments, of which twenty were rim shards. Several large pieces are included in the Historical Society's display cases.

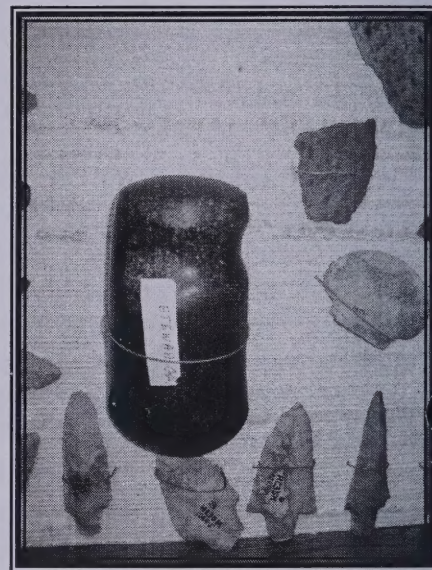
The Cedarland Site is a slightly smaller, stratified oyster shell and earth midden, also semi-circular in plan. The outer diameter of the midden is approximately 540 feet while the inner diameter is about three hundred feet. Unfortunately prior to the discovery of the site, shell had been taken from a borrow pit in the midden for local road construction.

The lower layer of the midden consists primarily of oyster shell with bones of small animals, deer, bear, fish, and waterfowl with charcoal and artifacts intermixed. Remnants of small clay lined hearths are scattered

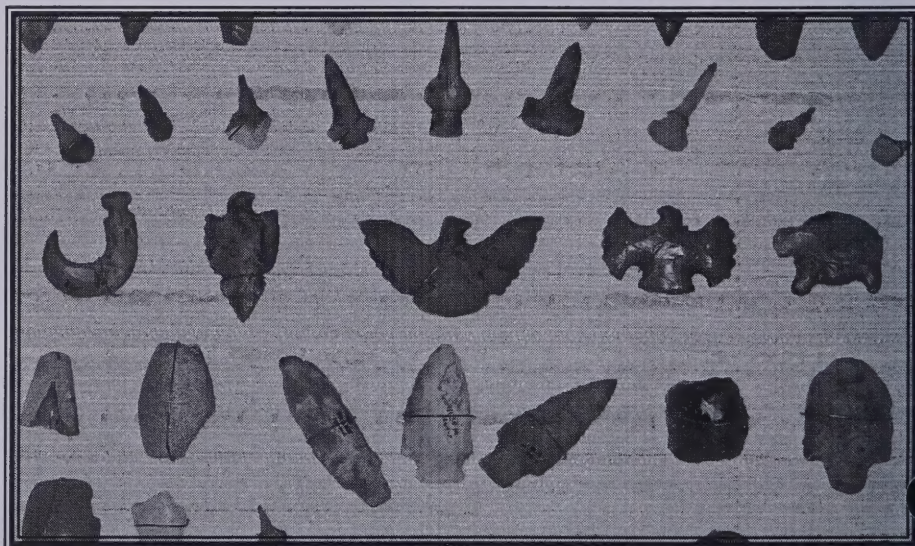
throughout the shell. The upper level is composed of black organic sand with charcoal, animal bones, and other artifacts.

Mr. Walden's collection will be on display at the Loblano House permanently. The two cases hold approximately half the items presently held by the Society.

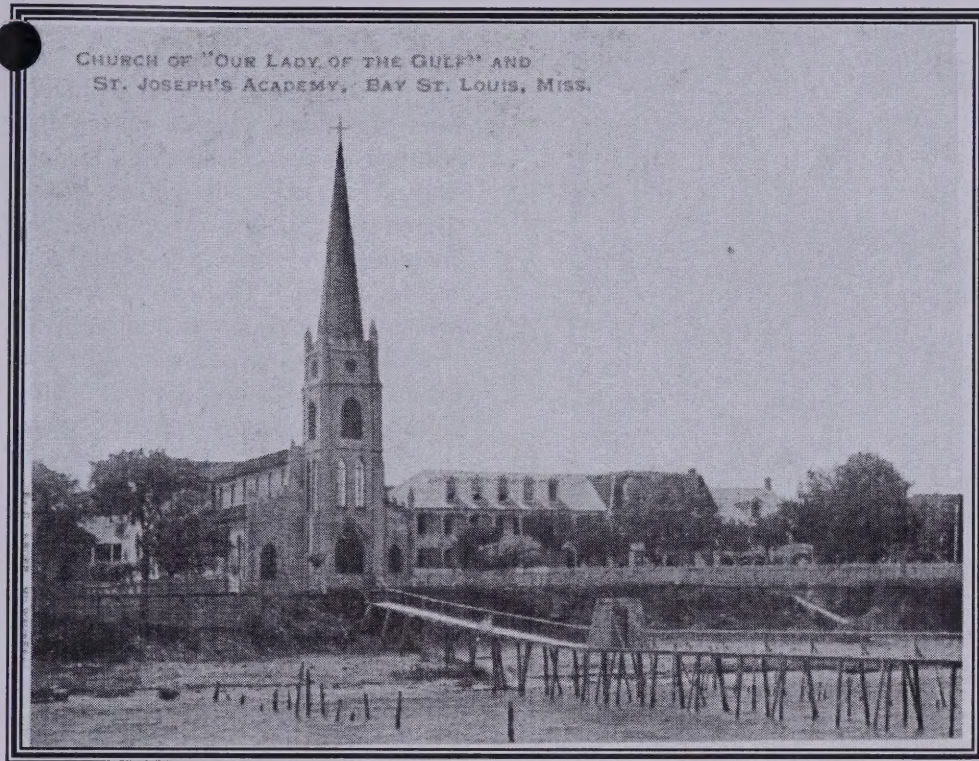
SOURCE: The preceeding article was taken primarily from *Geoscience and Man*, *The Poverty Point Culture* and *Bulletin No. 12, Southeastern Archaeological Conference*, both by Clarence H. Webb of the School of Geoscience, Louisiana State University. Both are in the HCHS library and are available to the public.



The above pictured cylindrical artifact has been documented as originally coming from Etowah, GA.



Notice the eagle (bird) artifacts as well as the fish hook at the far left and buffalo (?) figure at the far right.



The original Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church on  
South Beach Boulevard in Bay Saint Louis

## Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church Bay St. Louis

By  
Scott Bagley

We continue this month with our series on historic churches of Hancock County. Likely one of the most well-known landmarks in our county, if not on the entire Gulf Coast, is Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church located at 228 South Beach Boulevard in Bay St. Louis. This church's rich history is tied closely to the development of our area, and it has been a strong spiritual home for thousands of residents through the years.

As far back as about 1745, the area now known as Bay St. Louis had been recognized as a strong Catholic center with the liturgical needs of the population attended to by missionary priests. In July of

1837 Pope Gregory XVI established the Diocese of Natchez and appointed Bishop Chanche as its bishop. In 1842, Bishop Chanche sent Father Labbe to minister to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, including Bay St. Louis. Father Labbe was followed in fairly quick order by Father Boehme and Father Symphorien Guinard. Recognizing the strong and growing Catholic presence in the area, Bishop Chance formally established the Our Lady of the Gulf Parish in 1845. This new parish was the second oldest parish in the Diocese of Natchez, following the 1841 establishment of St. Mary's Cathedral in Natchez. In 1847 Bishop Chanche recognized that Bay St. Louis and the area around it needed a resident pastor and appointed the Rev. Louis Stanislaus Mary Buteaux to fill the position.

Born and educated in Paris, Fr. Buteaux's first assignment had been as a chaplain to a group of sis-

ters in Terre Haute, Indiana. However, the climate there proved too severe in winter, and Fr. Buteaux requested to be assigned further south. Bishop Chanche accommodated this request by appointing him the first permanent pastor at Bay St. Louis with responsibilities extending to Pass Christian, the Pearl, Jourdan and Wolf Rivers, and all lands inland twenty miles to the north. At the time of this assignment, Fr. Buteaux was thirty-nine years old.

Records of the church reflect that Father Buteaux arrived in Bay St. Louis (called Shieldsboro at this time) on the evening of August 8, 1847. He spent his first night at the Grand Hotel operated by John V. Toulme. For the next several days Fr. Buteaux met and talked with the scattered members of his mission. On August 15, he held his first mass in the Hancock County Courthouse, attended by approximately seventy people. About two weeks later, he performed his first marriage ceremony on the coast, and at the same service he called for donations for building a church.

Fr. Buteaux's request for support in building a church was overwhelmingly successful. On March 26, 1848, a mere seven months after his appointment, a ceremony, conducted by Bishop Odin of Galveston, was held to lay the cornerstone for the original Our Lady of the Gulf Church. The church, a brick structure of Gothic design, was built in two years and measured over 167 feet long by 46 feet wide. Its size made it the largest church in the Diocese of Natchez. The new church was dedicated on August 19, 1849, with a blessing by Bishop Chanche. On the evening of this dedication Bishop Blanc of New Orleans performed the blessing of the bells, named Mary and Joseph and donated by Mrs. Armans and Virginia Toulme.

On September 1, 1853, Fr.



St. Stanislaus College  
from an old post card

Buteaux opened a school for boys under the direction of the Christian Brothers. However, an epidemic of yellow fever forced the school's closing soon after it opened. In 1854 the school reopened directed by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and named St. Stanislaus, the patron saint of Fr. Buteaux.

Soon thereafter Fr. Buteaux returned to his home country, France, where he obtained the Sisters of St. Joseph to open a school for girls in the parish. The Sisters arrived in Bay St. Louis in early January 1855 to begin the founding of St. Joseph's Academy.

The Rev. Henry LeDuc, also of France, took over pastoral responsibilities in November of 1859. One of Fr. LeDuc's many contributions to Our Lady of the Gulf was his saving the church from Yankee destruction during the Civil War by holding aloft a cross in front of the church during some significant shelling. The federal soldiers, mostly Irish Catholics, instantly ceased firing out of respect. As a result, the church and possibly much of the town were saved from destruction by Fr. LeDuc.

Following the war, black

Catholics in Bay St. Louis worshipped together with the white parishioners at Our Lady of the Gulf, but they were assigned separate places to sit and kneel. Church records reflect, however, that a school behind the Our Lady of the Gulf, known as St. Rose de Lima, provided a separate religious education for twenty-four black children as early as

1868.

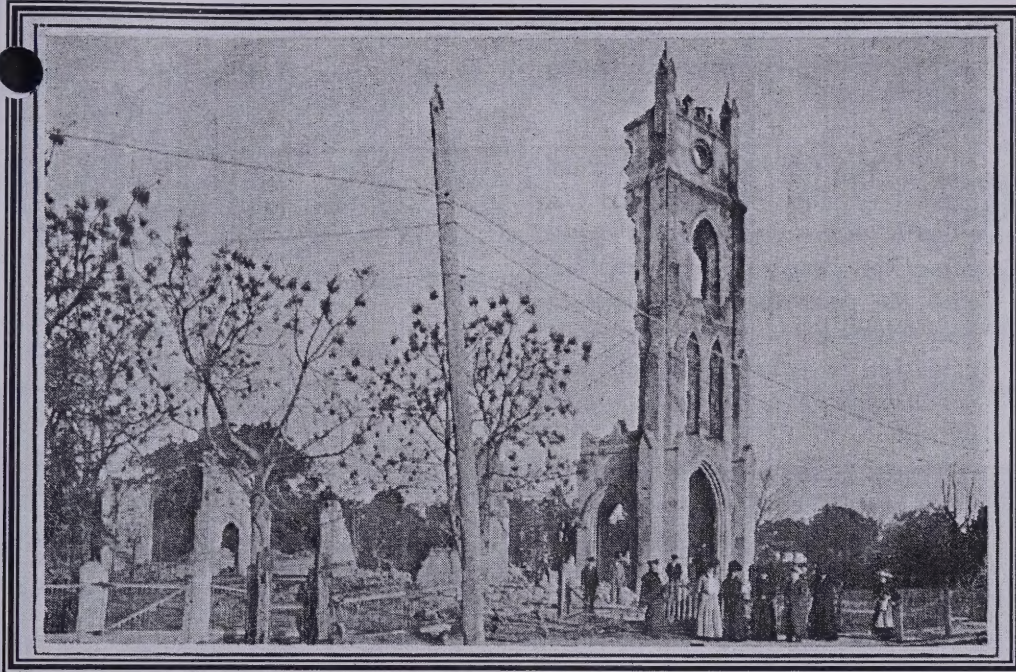
Our Lady of the Gulf underwent significant change during the post-war period. Under the leadership of Fr. LeDuc, the gallery of the church was enlarged to accommodate boarding students from St. Stanislaus and St. Joseph. The church was repainted, and a door was built in front of the church to accommodate the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. A previously built rectory was also plastered and painted. To pay for the work, a vocal concert was staged and then a fair. A total of \$1700 was raised by both events. It is possible that the fair was the origin of the current annual church fair.

In 1868 a new bell tower was constructed that probably replaced the old one that was damaged by shelling during the war. A new 1,540 pound bell, donated by Mrs. J. Schiller, was blessed five years later. Many people believe that the previous bells may have been removed during the war and melted down for use in the conflict.

Fr. LeDuc's tenure ended on August 27, 1897, when he died as a



St. Joseph's Academy as it looked prior to the fire of 1907



As well as other buildings in Bay Saint Louis, the 1907 fire destroyed Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church and St. Joseph's Academy which stood to the right of the church.

result of a leg injury received during trip to France. He was succeeded by the Very Rev. Florimond J. Blanc. Under his leadership electric lights were installed in the church and property was purchased where the present rectory stands. Unfortunately, Fr. Blanc fell ill and died in June of 1903. He is buried in the vault beneath the Calvary in St. Mary's Cemetery, the cemetery having been opened during the pastorate of Fr. LeDuc.

Fr. Aloise van Waesberghe followed Fr. Blanc and served from 1903 to 1906 when he died and was also buried in St. Mary's Cemetery. The Rev. John M. Prendergast was appointed the next pastor of Our Lady of the Gulf. During his tenure, on November 16, 1907, a catastrophic fire destroyed the church, the rectory, and St. Joseph's Academy. Immediately thereafter Fr. Prendergast formulated plans for a new church. On October 4, 1908, the first mass in the new church was celebrated by Fr. Prendergast.

In early 1918 Fr. Gmelch

became the next pastor of Our Lady of the Gulf Church. Under his tenure both Waveland and St. Rose de Lima became separate parishes, and the St. Augustine Mission House was established by the Fathers of the Divine

Word. The fathers also took over the previously mentioned black school in 1923.

Over the next few decades the Our Lady of the Gulf parish continued to thrive under the leadership of many good priests including Fr. Gmelch who served until 1955. Fr. Gmelch is also buried with other pastors in St. Mary's Cemetery.

In 1960 Our Lady of the Gulf School was founded under the direction of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the work of Msgr. Martin Maloney. It was known as Our Lady of the Gulf School until 1976 when it became interparochial and was renamed Bay Catholic Elementary School (later becoming Holy Trinity Elementary).

As a result of the declining number of the Sisters of St. Joseph, the academy they founded graduated its last class in 1967. However, in 1969, under the pastorate of Monsignor Gregory J. Johnson, plans for a new school for girls were started. In 1971, a new high school opened and



This picture was taken during the dedication of the bells for the new church in 1908. Notice the newly built St. Joseph's Academy at the left.

was named Our Lady Academy. The school continues today under the leadership of the Sisters of Mercy and a group of dedicated lay faculty members.

Hurricane Camille struck in August of 1969 bringing much damage to the area. Our Lady of the Gulf Church sustained comparatively minor damage allowing even a wedding to be held in the church a week after the hurricane. The rectory/office was significantly damaged and required complete reconstruction.

Unfortunately Our Lady of the Gulf Church was not so lucky with the landfall of Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005. The church and its facilities sustained approximately \$3.5 million in damages. Within two months, however, rebuilding and restoring began and are virtually complete today. Rebuilding included a new rectory/office that is compatible with the style of the 1908 church.

In 2008 Our Lady of the Gulf Church celebrated its history as well as the 100th anniversary of the building of the church following the fire of 1907. In a letter to family and

friends at the time of the celebration, current pastor, Fr. Michael Tracey, stated:

*May this history in word and picture of Our Lady of the Gulf Church inspire you. May it remind you of how deeply we are intertwined with the generations past and the generations yet to come. And may it guide you on your own unique journey through life to the fullness of life in God.*

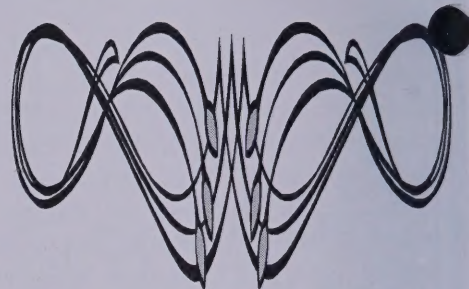
(The author wishes to thank Kathleen LeBlanc, Pastoral Associate at Our Lady of the Gulf Church, for her help in gathering information for this article.)

Sources:

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*Welcome to Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church* (2008), pp. 1; 7—8.



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Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church  
as it presently stands on South Beach Boulevard

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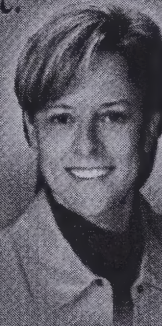
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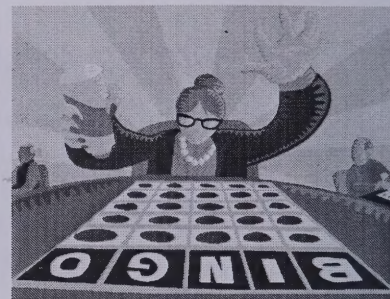


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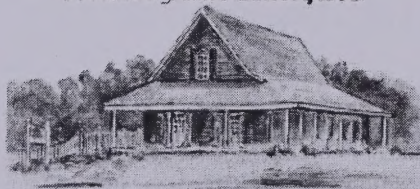
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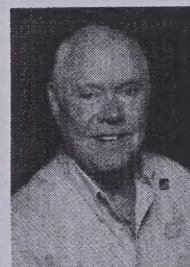
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